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AUTHOR Danis, Ruth
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ABSTRACT

Research on schoolboard and city council elections over a 60-year period in Santa Barbara, California, indicates that the community made roughly simultaneous changes in policy direction in both political areas. The study examines the effects of common ideologies or values on electoral issues and candidates as well as the role of elections as mechanisms of change. Both a general model, derived from V. O. Key's theory of "turning point periods," and a model of ideological evolution are used to describe the sequence of events in change periods, in which shifts in values lead to a triggering election and thence to an affirming election, realignment, a final test election, and quiescence. The researchers apply conflict measures--including incumbent defeat, executive succession, the number of candidates, and voter turnout--to all elections during the 60-year period. They identify two change periods during which the two local governing agencies responded to shifts in broad community values. In the 1930s the community turned toward "equity," or social services, while in the 1970s the voters shifted toward "quality," or higher standards. (RW)

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THE STAGING OF VALUE STATEMENTS FROM INCEPTION TO IMPLEMENTATION DURING CRITICAL ELECTION PERIODS

Ruth Davis

Ultimately institutions are reflections of societal norms, and no system will survive if it does not adequately represent the culture it serves. School districts must be compatible with the constitutional framework they operate within. Instead of asking whether school boards are democratic (Ziegler & Jennings, 1974), and finding them wanting by defining democratic change as an outcome of every regularly scheduled election, it is more useful as ask how and to what extent democracy works in local educational agencies as they are now constituted.

A primary mechanism for change in a democratic society is the election of its public officials. Elections are the commonly accepted means by which an electorate can express general satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the status quo by retaining or removing "key decision makers." Therefore turnover of elected officials and their appointed executives is one basis for policy and organizational change in local governing agencies.

This study was a comparative and longitudinal examination of school board and city council elections over a period of approximately sixty years in a municipality whose institutional boundaries are for the most part coterminous. One of the main contentions of the research was that a predominant ideology or set of norms held by a common population during the same period is significant in ultimately deciding the nature of the issues debated and the kind of candidates elected to all local governing bodies. The data show that an electorate from a single community will

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respond with some degree of unanimity on policy direction regardless of the differences in services rendered by a school district and municipality.

A second assumption was that elections are a change mechanism over time (Schattschneider, 1960; Key, 1956; Burnham, 1970; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Crotty & Mitchell, 1981). The data confirm the "periodicity" of change by means of the ballot in both governing agencies. A comprehensive blueprint of critical elections and quiescence were designed by using election returns, newspapers, board agendas, organizational directories, annual audits and some campaign literature retrieved from local archives.

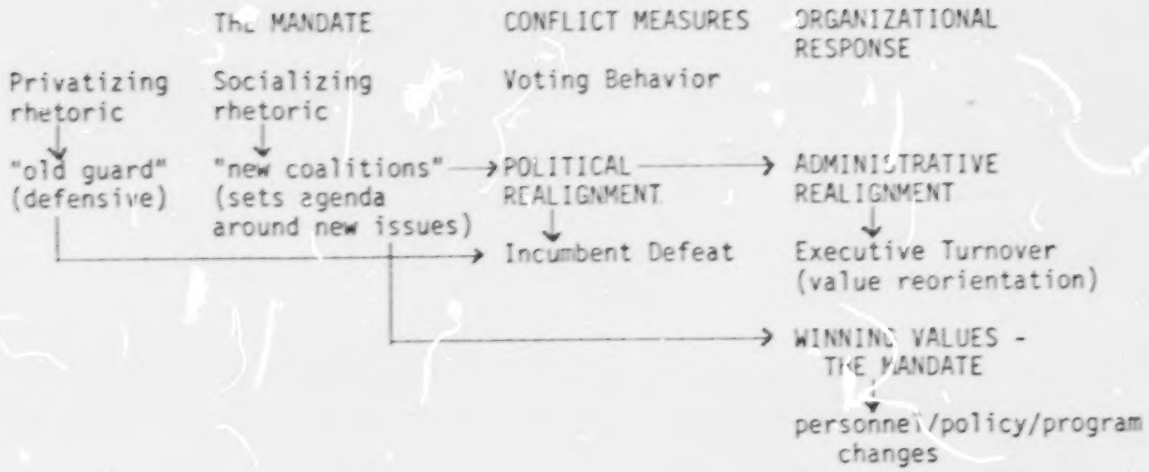
THE CHANGE MODEL

V. O. Key's description of critical election periods proved extremely useful in distinguishing electoral and non-electoral measures of conflict which were unique to "turning point periods." Anti-incumbent sentiment, the number of contestants for an office, ideological polarization, split boards and increased citizen participation were all applicable under Key's description of critical elections as exhibiting "duration" and "intensity."

Most salient of all Key's work was his concept of "realignment." Political, organizational, and value realignment became the functional equivalent of a "turning point period," in this study. Change categories, derived from election data, encompass the complete cycle:

Figure 1

"The Change Model"



What was demonstrated by the "change model," is that organizational outcomes are a result of antecedent political demands and these demands are consistent with emerging community values, as expressed through the ballot. The priorities of a citizenry result in the election of different policymakers, who in turn appoint individuals to leadership positions who are sympathetic to "changed values." The "winning values," ones that are predominant and viable in terms of the system, are then translated into policy and program changes.

"The Delineation of Turning Point Periods"

In order to determine when these change periods took place, conflict measures were applied to <u>all</u> regularly scheduled elections in both districts. There were "primary" measures of dissension, that were found in all cases of critical elections in both districts, and then there were "secondary" measures, which occurred during a specific period, or in only one district.

"Primary measures"

The Thorsted Conflict Index, or "TCI," was the most sensitive barometer of anti-incumbent sentiment. A second formula, the Minar Conflict Index, "MCI," was applied to all elections and it was successful in measuring general discontent. The TCI was higher than the MCI in all "triggering elections," or elections which initiated a realigning period. Incumbent defeat, or its functional equivalent as determined by one or more incumbents deciding not to run for reelection, was also a component of all "triggering elections."

Executive succession, one of the critical variables in the incumbent defeat studies (Walden, 1960; Freeborn, 1960), was present in the two "turning point periods" in this community. In the case of the city, the defeat of an incumbent Mayor was considered the functional equivalent of executive turnover, since the Mayor was given both policymaking and administrative responsibilities under the City Charter.

Another indicator of conflict which appeared to be correlated with change elections was the number of candidates running for office. Schattschneider (1960) described "socializing periods" as opening up the arena to an expanded audience. A larger number of contestants ran for all offices during "turning point periods." Public involvement was also measured in terms of attendance at meetings, and the amount of space "column inches devoted to candidates and issues" in the press.

Voter turnout worked well as a measure of citizen interest in municipal elections in the 1930's. Turnout peaked during the campaigns of a popular Mayor. Schattschneider suggested that the reason for low

voter turnout may not be apathy, but the lack of viable alternatives. The particular candidate that generated such overwhelming support did offer a competing ideology of governance to the public (rotation in office versus professional bureaucracy).

In the 1973 election there were incumbent defeats in both districts, thirty-nine candidates ran for City Council, substantial changes were introduced when the "reform" slate was elected, and fewer voters turned out than in 1971. After the 1950's, voter turnout seems to decline and it was difficult from a limited set of data to do more than hypothesize its origins.

THREE THEMES

"A Comparative and Longitudinal Study"

Critical election periods and quiescence were parallel in both districts. Incumbent defeats, with one exception, occurred approximately at the same point in time over a sixty year period. The one exception took place during quiescence. Election indicators and the crystallization of emerging values were congruent. Although the institutionalization of new values varied, depending on organizational peculiarities, the "themes" borne by "winning values" persisted. The following chart isolates critical election periods and quiescence and specifies the nature of the persistent theme or public mandate:

Figure 2

"Turning Point Periods"/Quiescence

	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1951	1963	1973	1974	1978
School District	T	RECALL	STO	STO			ID	ID	T ID	STO	ISTO
City Themes	ID	EQUITY			T ID	RECALL		ID	T 4ID	QUALITY	

The 1930's and the 1970's were "turning point periods, "TPP." There was a "triggering election," "T," in the school district in 1931 and in the city in 1935. The "triggering elections" occurred in 1973 in both districts. An incumbent board member lost, and four incumbent councilmembers were defeated, including one who ran for Mayor. Superintendent turnover, "STO," was present after "triggering elections," but not in quiescence. An expansion of services or "equity" was the theme of the 1930's, while standards or "quality" was espoused in both districts in the 1970's. Incumbent defeat, or its functional equivalent occurred in all "triggering elections."

"Values"

A shift in values is one of the earliest signs of public discontent and a desire for new policy directions, later defined as a "mandate." The following chart isolates the stages of an episode and the corresponding progression of a public mandate from its inception to its implementation:

Figure 3

"Evolution of a new ideology"

ascension /	triggering / election	affirming election /	realignment /	final / test	quiescence
1	2	3	4	5	6
preserving rhetoric	challenging rhetoric	preserving rhetoric becomes irrelevant	implementation of new values	acceptance of changes in services	adoption of a New Mandate
procedural debates	polarization	debate over challenging rhetoric			

1) Ascension. Both the literature (Sellers, 1964) and the data reveal a period preceding a "triggering election" during which there is a rise in the level of political conflict. During ascension the dominant rhetoric is conservative, it protects and preserves the prevailing ideology. Means or procedures, rather than ends are subject to debate. There was a lack of clarity on issues since underlying assumptions were not dealt with. Data indicate that there was no single overriding problem which was pointed to as a consequence of "ill-conceived" policy decisions. Because of issue diffuseness and increasing levels of tension, ascension elections appeared uncomfortable. Without value clarity there are no means of getting a handle on the problems. Neither side could articulate what was at stake. There was unhappiness without direct confrontation. Board members did not run for reelection.

Since fundamental tenets were not challenged it was difficult to decipher these elections, except as indications of general dissatisfaction with policies and/or services, which can and will become more focused

over time. It is during this period that election returns might be carefully examined by practitioners. Ascension periods act as an "early warning system," for those who can see the pattern of escalation and understand the consequences of not intervening.

2) "Triggering Elections." Triggering elections are a consequence of value cleavages as articulated by new coalitions of citizens, according to the data. Value positions were polarized during "triggering elections." Preserving rhetoric of the "old guard" was confronted with socializing rhetoric of the challengers. Socializing rhetoric always (1) demands access or responsiveness by the institution to newcomers and (2) promotes new values. It politicizes the normally incremental decision making pattern (Schattschneider, 1960). More citizens run for public office.

Conservative language by the "ins" was used to support existing policy. This was accomplished by using the terminology of "privatization," focusing on procedural questions and denying the need to discuss goals. Those who desire access ask about "purposes" or emphasize "ends" rather than "means." They want to know "who benefits?" Equity is at the podium since the heart of the debate is equal opportunity for all to share in what advantages governing bodies have to offer. Contesting the fairness of how, and to whom resources are being allocated under existing policies, is the essence of democratic change. This is an integral part of "critical election" periods.

"Socializing rhetoric" is inclusive. New issues were identified during "triggering elections," and continuously clarified around cleavages

originally established. A "triggering election" sets the agenda for all future debates. Old issues become irrelevant (Schattschneider, 1960).

3) Affirming Election. Criswell discovered from his data that the second election after an incumbent defeat may be an even more powerful indicator of realignment than the first. The second election can affirm "winning values" by replacing the "old guard." It strengthens the hands of a new executive by insuring support at the policy level for substantial changes in the delivery of services. An "affirming election" may be an incumbent defeat, or an incumbent's decision not to run, but it wipes the slate clean. If this does not occur, politicization will persist (as in Robertsdale).

"Affirming election" rhetoric revolves around the new platform. Old issues have become obsolete, and instead of juxtaposing issues as either/or, it becomes: "to what extent" or "how much?" By the time of an "affirming election," there was greater likelihood of identifying and articulating the "winning values." Dialog was more realistic. Prior polarization of perspectives encouraged an impractical manner of framing alternatives. The old guard became more entrenched and would deny the existence of problems, and the challengers would develop an ideal from which to redirect policies. An "affirming election" defined the problems in more acceptable terms. Boundaries were prescribed.

4) Realignment. The operationalization of the "mandate," or realignment, occurs within a period of years subsequent to a "triggering election." The speed with which public demands are translated into policy and program changes depended on the nature of the mandate (a negative message

to stop a process, i.e., growth, was easier to accomplish within a short time, then desire for "quality education"). Implementation may also be delayed by turnover or the lack of it at the policy level, and the strength of the opposition. Negotiations and accommodations with members of the public, policymakers and employees can prevent a complete overhaul of the delivery of services for years. Realignment became the basis for future policy decisions.

5) A Final Test Election. This election signaled the end of "politicization" for that period. A final test election indicated citizens had accepted organizational changes as consistent with the new priorities. There was public confirmation and approval of administrative changes by means of a ballot. A final test election settled the matter of policy guidelines for the future. There was evidence to demonstrate that after an "affirming election" the ideological boundaries were set, and after a final test election, the structural-functional changes which were instituted by the local governing agencies as a response to new priorities were approved.

There were some examples of affirming and final test elections that demonstrate their distinctiveness:

Figure 4

	Affirming		Final Test	
School District	1937	1977	1935	1979
City	1936 Recall	1975	1939	1977

Affirming elections in both districts led to the election of candidates sympathetic to change in 1933 and 1977 in the school district and 1939

in the city. These elections reinforced new priorities by removing the old guard. In 1975 the new councilmembers elected to office represented a mixed message in respect to the new mandate. The public persistently voted to support the new mandate within limits. Two pro-growth contestants were elected at the same time an advisory proposition setting population limits on municipal growth was approved. Affirming elections can stabilize conditions by indicating how far the public is willing to go on an issue. This was true in the city. Advocates of change comprised a majority, but challengers still held office. Accommodations had to be reached.

Final test elections reelected incumbents, elected officials sympathetic to the mandate, or maintained those in office who operated within realistic limits imposed under a new agenda. In some manner though, the final test election confirmed the interpretation of the mandate by local officials and approved its institutionalization.

6) Quiescence. In "quiescence" the organization operates on the basis of the new value cleavages. "Winning values" became part of the fundamental policy assumptions which determined the direction of organizational decisions. Decision making is "incremental" or negotiated between and among small groups and/or individuals during periods of stability, because major policy issues were set in place during realignment. The "mandate" became the prevailing myth. Lindblom not only demonstrated the normal policy process, as one of incremental change, but he also acknowledged that it functions in that manner because there is concurrence on underlying principles:

> Any even loosely organized set of interlocking generalizations or principles about social organization-or more specifically about politico-economic organization-is of enormous help to policy analysis...All policy analysis rests to a degree on ideology so defined...In effect an ideology takes certain beliefs out of the gunfire of criticism...These...beliefs ...can thereafter be introduced into policy analysis as though they were settled fact...Even mistaken beliefs can serve... because we chose a common set of assumptions.

Policy systems depend on such beliefs or myths (MacIver, 1965) and it is when the purposes of these institutions become subject to public debate that these myths are replaced with new ones.

Figure 5

An Episode

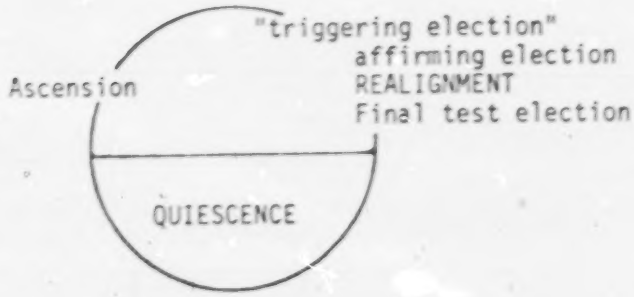


Figure 5 depicts the full cycle. Quiescence occupies the largest part of the circle. It is during these long periods of stability that "established" or "issue oriented elites" determine the nature of the accommodations or adjustments made continuously by the organization. When incumbents did not win reelection during quiescence, "personality" distinctions, or an "ins versus outs" phenomenon were at work. Strong value distinctions were never characteristic of elections during quiescence. Issue diffuseness was found to be greatest when analyzing the

1951 incumbent defeat of a school board member. By 1963 the onset of public discontent was indicated by two incumbent defeat campaigns that depicted a sharpening of rhetoric and an increase in demands, but a continuing lack of value clarification. It was the beginning of ascension. The "myth" was no longer functional, but alternatives were yet to evolve.

LOCAL CONTROL

Voting behavior required officials to adopt a policy orientation which was within the zone of tolerance of the community. Teachers were unable to affect the policy direction of the school district in 1979 without a coalition of citizens supporting them. The public selects which groups and exogenous events it will permit to influence the existing mandate. Federal and state promulgations have been persistently used in the late 1960's and the early 1970's as a lever to insure "equity" in the system. Both local governing agencies responded to broader community values and subordinated issues of "equity" to other local priorities. Local control was a reality, not a myth.

This study also found that voting was an instrument for producing readjustment of the relationship between the governed and those governing over time. The vote was a powerful conduit for newly emerging public priorities. These new priorities may have been an outgrowth of demographic changes or a consequence of some adherence or commitment to a new belief system (progressive education, environmentalism). National movements had their local counterparts, but regardless of the origin of the demands, the politics of change were played out in terms of local

conditions and local needs. Alternating periods of "privatization" and "socialization" was the dynamic which explained "value" changes in both local governing agencies. Change in one community affects all local institutions in the same manner, it occurs over time and is value laden.